GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH OUR PRESIDENTS

By GEORGE H. PICARD

XIII---Our Presidents' Ancestors.

Of George Washington's Ancestors we know very little—not much more than we do of those of William Shakespeare. The haziness which obscures the Washington family record is all the more remarkable because the first President was born in a region where family tradition is cherished with the utmost pride and care. It is not easy to account for the fact that even the early boyhood of Washington is veiled in this impenetrable mist. Pretty much all we know is that the few anecdotes which are told of him are of doubtful authenticity.

It is known, however, that the President was of the fourth generation of Washingtons settled in America. John Washington, his great-grandfather, came over from England about 1657, with his brother, Lawrence, and in time became a landed proprietor and planter in the part of Virginia known as the "Northern Neck," a district lying between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. It is claimed by some of those who have made a study of the Washington genealogy that this first representative of the family in America was a man of consequence in his native England, who had been drawn by the lure of the wild into the American wilderness. That may have been true, but the confirmatory records are missing.

Thus transplanted, Washington left two sons, Lawrence and John, of whom and of whose doing practically nothing is known. Lawrence was the father of Augustine, who for his second wife married Mary Ball, a Virginian young woman of great beauty and intelligence, although she brought him no fortune. The oldest of the six children of this marriage became our first President.

There are but scant records to shed light on the character of Augustine Washington. The clearest picture that can be formed of him is brought to view by a perusal of the few existing letters of his second wife. From them it is evident that he was something more than the prosperous Virginia planter, perhaps the most prosperous Washington who had ever lived. Although but an unlettered Virginia squire himself, he thought well enough of education to send his oldest son, Lawrence, to Oxford. From one of Mary Washington's letters it is apparent that her husband had scruples as to the moral side of slavery, although the estate on the Rappahannock which he bequeathed to his son George was worked by these human chattels, and Mount Vernon, the splendid inheritance of his cultured firstborn, Lawrence, also was tilled by an army of sable bondsmen.

Came Before the Washingtons.

The American ancestors of John Adams reached this country seventeen years earlier than the Washingtons. They were friends and co-religionists of more than one of the little band of Pilgrims who had landed in Plymouth Rock twenty years before their own coming. Unlike the Washingtons, they had wrung but scant substance from the rocky soil of New England, and the father of John Adams, whose namesake the second President was, could not have sent his son to Oxford, even had he been so minded. Fortunately for him, his religious preferences did not incline him in that direction. What he desired most of all was to make a Congregational minister of his son, the perfectly normal ambition of one who was a deacon in the church of that denomination at Braintree, near Boston.

The expense of an education at Harvard in those days amounted to about $90 per annum, and it taxed the ingenuity of the deacon and his thrifty wife to obtain the money, but by dint of abundant personal sacrifice they managed it. That tells the tale of Adams's ancestors, nor does it detract from the interest of the story to give its sequel—instead of a village pastor, with no hope of preferment, the son became a lawyer and the second President of the United States. Afterwards, in the case of his son, the accomplished John Quincy, John Adams interposed no parental restrictions. Strange as it undoubtedly was, the son became the stanch advocate of the Puritanism which his father declined to serve in his early days and never ceased to criticize.

Peter Jefferson, father of the author of the Declaration of Independence, was of Welsh lineage, the descendant of a pioneer colonist who came to Virginia at the time of its first settlement. When Peter reached manhood he found himself the owner of an estate of nearly two thousand acres along the banks of the Rivanna, only partially cleared and surrounded on all sides by a wilderness still the home of more or less predatory bands of Indians and wild animals. At this time he was a suitor for the hand of the beautiful and cultivated Jane Randolph, whom he had met at the house of her brother, William Randolph, of Tuckahoe, one of the most prominent men in Virginia.

She Preferred Love in a Cottage.

Jane Randolph had all the eligible young men of the colony at her feet, but she amazed her friends and disgusted her family by becoming Mrs. Peter Jefferson and exchanging the stately old Randolph mansion on the James River for the log cabin which her young husband had built on the Rivanna. She was seventeen at the time and her husband was three years her senior. With the splendid enthusiasm of youth and a mutual taste for adventure, the young couple set up housekeeping on their remote estate and proceeded to conquer the wilderness.

Jane Jefferson was born in England, and they christened the homestead Shadwell, after the London parish in which she first saw the light. At Shadwell our third President was born, two sisters preceding him and others following, so that in a few years a large brood of Jeffersons made things lively at the homestead on the Rivanna. It was a home devoid of luxury, but abounding in comforts. Peter Jefferson was in easy circumstances and his new plantation was yielding generous returns. The district was filling up with settlers and Peter became its leading citizen. He was very popular in the new community and was undoubtedly a man of marked intelligence, shrewd sense and strong character. For a number of years he practised land surveying extensively, thereby adding considerably to his income. County honors gravitated naturally to such a man, and in due time the Shadwell planter filled the offices of justice of the peace, colonel of Albemarle county and representative in the House of Burgesses. At the time of his death, August 17, 1757, Colonel Jefferson was one of the most prominent citizens of Virginia.

The Madison family tree struck its roots far back among the earliest days of the province. Fifteen years before the settlement of Jamestown an adventurous Madison from Devonshire landed on the southern Chesapeake shore and began what turned out to be a permanent lorgment in the Virginia wilderness. During the century and a quarter between that early beginning and the birth of our fourth President, there had been ample time for the Madison family to establish itself firmly in the New World, and it had done so. James Madison, father of the President, was a notable member of that wealthy and socially prominent planter class which provided the country with so many of its early Presidents and statesmen.

The Madisons and Monroes Were Aristocrats.

President Madison came of a vigorous breed, physically, morally and intellectually. He was nurtured in a refined, gracious and hospitable domestic atmosphere. In the beautiful and picturesque region of the Blue Ridge in which Montpelier, the family estate, was situated the Madisons had been Virginians of consequence for generations. It was a name that carried weight with it in all parts of the province.

The Monroes, also, were members of the provincial landed aristocracy. Like the Madisons, they came to Virginia at a very early period, the original American Monroe being a younger son of a noble Scottish family. Spence Monroe, the President's father, was a man of affairs in the province. Their estate in Westmoreland county was one of the most opulent in Virginia, almost as extensive as that of the Washingtons, their near neighbors and friends.

Jackson the Son of an Irish Peasant.

In 1765 an Irishman of Scotch descent, who had known nothing save the most grinding poverty in his native land, emigrated, with his wife and two small children, from Belfast to South Carolina. The humble immigrants had no money to buy land even at the merely nominal rate at which it was held in the colonies. So, after landing at Charleston and remaining there a few months, they struck out into the wild interior, halting near what is now the boundary line between the Carolinas. After clearing an opening in the pine wilderness, the young Irishman put in a crop, but fell sick and died before he could harvest it. That Irish immigrant who did not live to reap the reward of his summer toil was Andrew Jackson, father of our seventh President, and his death occured a few days prior to the birth of his third child and namesake.

At the time of the passing of the head of the family, the Jacksons were living in a rude log cabin just across the border in South Carolina. After the funeral of her husband, which was held in the little log church of the settlement, Mrs. Jackson did not return to her desolate home, but went, with her children, to the cabin of her brother-in-law, an Irishman named McKenney, just over the line in North Carolina. There the future President was born, despite his whim in after life to call himself a South Carolinian.

Both Abraham Van Buren and Maria Hoes, parents of our eighth President, were direct descendants of the early Dutch colonists who had settled on the banks of the Hudson. They were of the Knickerbocker stock which appealed so forcibly to the inventive genius of Washington Irving, and Abraham, who was a tavern keeper, may have been the original of one of the author's most famous characters. He was a man of most imperturbable good nature and an uncomprising Democrat. His distinguished son inherited both his father's bonhomie and his political creed.

William H. Harrison and Benjamin, his grandson, ninth and twenty-third Presidents of the United States, were respectively, eighth and tenth in descent from John Rolfe and Pocahontas. Neither of the Harrisons inherited marked Indian characteristics, but the elder was one of the most successful Indian fighters in our early history. His father, Benjamin Harrison, was one of the most distinguished men in the American colonies, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, an intimate friend of Washington, a candidate for speaker in the famous Congress of 1775, Governor of Virginia and twice re-elected. A man of enormous stature and girth and also of indomitable good nature, Governor Harrison was the humorist of the Continental Congress and never showed a trace of the lack of appreciation of a joke which might have been expected from a direct descendant of the grim redskin warrior, Powhatan and his sad-faced daughter.

Like all the Virginia Presidents, John Tyler numbered among his ancestors the most substantial men of those who had made the province the richest agricultural section of the New World. The Tylers had been leaders in Virginia public and social life for many years before the tenth President was born. Both John Tyler, his father, and Mary Armistead, his mother, were of English descent. John Tyler, the elder was Speaker of the House of Delegates, judge of the Supreme Court and Governor of the state.

In 1735, near the southwestern frontier of North Carolina, now known as Mecklenburg county, a Scotch-Irish band of pioneers formed a settlement. In the company were two brothers, Thomas and Ezekiel Polk, men of excellent character and influential. When the news reached this distant region that the British were making themselves obnoxious, in 1775, a convention was called to discuss the matter, and while it was in session the news came that the first blood of the Revolution had been shed at Lexington. Patriotic resolutions were adopted unanimously and Colonel Thomas Polk read them from the courthouse steps at Charlotte. One of these resolutions declared that "we, the citizens of Mecklenburg Co., do hereby dissolve the political bands which have connected us to the mother country and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British Crown, and we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people."

The Polks Were Sterling Patriots.

Of Ezekiel Polk, the grandfather of the eleventh President, little is known beyond the fact that he was a warm supporter of the patriot cause and contributed liberally to the movement to drive Lord Cornwallis out of the Carolinas. When the British ravaged the Carolinas, the Polks lost most of their property and the President's father, Samuel Polk, began life as a comparatively poor man. With his young family he emigrated west about three hundred miles and made a new home in the wilderness, in time becoming exceedingly well to do; so that, by the time the future President arrived at adolescence, his father was regarded as the richest man in Maury county.

Colonel Richard Taylor, father of our twelfth President, was a Virginian of note, a distinguished patriot and a soldier of the Revolution. Both he and his wife, Sarah Shrother, were descendants of the earliest English settlers, and both families had been prominent in the building of the commonwealth. Soon after Zachary was born, Colonel Taylor met with financial reverses, and emigrated to Kentucky, then an unexplored wilderness, and settled near the present city of Louisville. There he divided his attention about equally between developing the big estate which he had mapped out for himself and defending himself and his family from the active opposition of the original Indian owners of the tract.

Nathaniel Fillmore, the father of the man who stepped from the Vice Presidency into the White House at the death of General Taylor, was a farmer in humble circumstances, working a piece of land on shares, in Cayuga county, New York, but owning no real estate of his own. Both the Fillmores and the Millards were of English origin, as were also the ancestors of Franklin Pierce, who succeeded the New York man. The latter's father was a Revolutionary soldier, a man of inflexible integrity, although mentally uncultivated. During the administration of John Adams, a scheme was set on foot to draw the United States into an alliance with England in her war with the French republic and Major Pierce was offered a high position in the army which was to be drafted into service.

"No, gentlemen," he replied. "Poor as I am, I would rather go to yonder mountains, dig me a cave and live on roast potatoes than be instrumental in promoting such a cause."

James Buchanan's forebears were Scotch-Irish, his father coming to this country from the linen-manufacturing district of North Ireland and settling at Cove Gap, a small hamlet at the foot of the Alleghenies. True to the commercial instincts of his Belfast ancestry, James Buchanan, the elder, opened a small linen shop and managed to eke out a rather precarious existence. Five years after his arrival in America, he wedded Elizabeth Speer, the daughter of a respectable farmer, staked out a claim in the wild Allegheny country and proceeded to make a comfortable home for himself.

Lincoln Came From the "Poor White" Class.

Both Thomas Lincoln, the father of the Great Emancipator, and Jacob Johnson, the father of the Vice-President who served out Lincoln's unexpired term, belonged to the despised class known south as "poor whites." Both came originally from English stock, but Lincoln's American ancestry was distinctively Puritan, beginning with a Samuel Lincoln, who came to the town of Hingham, Mass., some time between 1635 and 1645. Many of the descendants of this Lincoln were prominene in the early history of the Massachusetts colony. About the beginning of the last century representatives of the family began to drift southward, first to New Jersey, then to Pennsylvania and finally to Virginia. Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the President, who was named after him, sold his property in Virginia, and moved himself and his family into the Kentucky wilderness. At the time of his death, 1788, he seems to have been in fairly comfortable circumstances. His eldest son, Mordecai, inherited the bulk of the estate, and the younger brothers were left to scratch for themselves. Thomas, the youngest, was the father of the President. He was probably the poorest Lincoln who ever lived, but his son became the greatest.

Both Grant and Hayes were of Scotch descent, the former with an ancestry that made no especial claim of noble and ancient lineage and the latter rather more pretentious, easily traced back, it is claimed, to 1280, when Hayes and Rutherford were two Scottish chieftains fighting side by side with Baliol, William Wallace and Robert Bruce. The Hayes family has always made a point of its coat of arms—a shield barred and surmounted by a flying eagle. About the eagle and above the shield is a circle of stars, while on a scroll underneath the shield is inscribed the motto "Recte." The father of President Hayes was an industrious, frugal and open-hearted man who was "of a mechanical turn and could mend a plow, knit a stocking or do almost anything else he chose to undertake." At the close of the war of 1812, he emigrated from his native Brattleboro, Vt., to Ohio.

The father of James A. Garfield was a native of Worcester, Otsego county, N. Y., and his mother, Eliza Ballou, was a native of New Hampshire and a relative of Hosea Ballou, the famous preacher. The Garfields were conspicuous in colonial history, and their remote ancestry is traced easily back to Welsh and English sources.

Forebears of Our Later Presidents.

In 1818 a young fello of eighteen named William Arthur crossed the Atlantic Ocean in one of the lumbering and uncomfortable packets which plied between the north coast of Ireland and the Canadian ports. He was a descendant of the Scotch-English settlers in Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland, a bright young man, a graduate of the University of Belfast. The tales of successful business enterprises in America and the encouragement of the English government had induced this youth to seek his fortune in Canada. He never found it, but he was the father of Chester Alan Arthur, the New York Vice-President who served out Garfield's unexpired term.

Grover Cleveland was of English stock, and he was a lineal descendant of Rev. Aaron Cleveland, a famous clergyman of the English Church in 1750, who was located at East Haddam, Conn. This divine was one of Benjamin Franklin's intimates, and died at the philosopher's house in Philadelphia. Franklin spoke of his friend as "a gentleman of humane and pious disposition, indefatigable in his ministry, easy and affable in his conversation, open and sincere in his friendship, and above every species of meanness and dissimulation." This was high praise from a man who, as a rule, had small regard for the cloth. This clergyman's son, who was also named Aaron Cleveland, was a famous Federalist and advocate of antislavery principles. In after life he was ordained a minister of the Congregational Church. His son, President Cleveland's grandfather, was a deacon in the Congregational Church at Norwich, Conn., and the President's father, Rev. Richard F. Cleveland, followed in the footsteps of his immediate ancestors, although in the course of time he so modified his theology that he became pastor of a Presbyterian congregation.

President McKinley was of Scotch-Irish ancestry, the family being well established in this country prior to the Revolutionary War. David McKinley, the President's great-grandfather, was a soldier in the great struggle against the mother country. Theodore Roosevelt comes from a Dutch family, which was conspicuous in the early history of New Amsterdam. One of his ancestors, Nicholas J. Roosevelt, was the inventor of the vertical paddle wheel for use in steamboats. The ex-President's uncle, Robert B. Roosevelt, was United States minister to Holland. President Taft's ancestry is English. His father, Alphonso Taft, was Attorney-General of the United States in Hayes's administration.

BUENA VISTA

(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)

Buena Vista, Va., April 13.—Monday evening the dramatic Club of the Southern Seminary presented "Holly Tree Inn," by Charles Dickens. The audience was very appreciative of the efforts of the young women.

The V. P. I.-V. M. I. game in Roanoke Monday attracted a number of people from this city. Among those who attended were Mrs. Killough, Miss Killough, Misses Grace and Rubinetta Lee and A. W. Robertson.

Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Embree are spending several days in Bristol this week.

Miss Mary Brown, of Charlottesville is the guest of T. T. Dickinson.

Miss Fannie Lee, of Irvington, who spent the Easter holidays with her sisters, Misses Grace and Rubinetta Lee, at the Southern Seminary, returned to her home Tuesday. She was accompanied as far as Lynchburg by Miss Rubinette Lee.